(c) TheTsunami disaster in Sri Lanka and other Indian Ocean rim countries attracted a very high degree of international attention and evoked an enormous outpouring of compassion and international assistance to the affected countries, including Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Exact details of the assistance to Sri Lanka are not readily available as assistance was channeled through a number of sources including UN agencies and NGOs. However, as per available information, it is known that the United States deployed about 700-800 US Marines on the island of Sri Lanka for relief operations; Pakistan deployed two ships, three aircraft, 50 marines a field hospital, 180 man army engineering team, and a shipload of earthmoving and transport equipment; Bangladesh deployed one ship, a diving team and two aircraft; UK deployed two ships and helicopters; Russia deployed aircraft; and disaster management teams were deployed by Canada and France. In addition to the above, it is known that Canada, Germany, UK, China and multilateral agencies have announced a number of financial measures such as debt-relief for Sri Lanka. A number of countries have also made financial donations and pledges to assist in the reconstruction of Sri Lanka.

Precise details of assistance to Maldives are not readily available as assistance was routed through a number of channels including UN agencies and NGOs. As per available information two Pakistani ships that were already in Male when the Tsunami struck were deployed on emergency relief operation; Bangladesh deployed a patrol vessel and a helicopter; and France deployed a naval vessel. A number of countries have made financial donations and pledges to assist in the reconstruction of the Maldives.

Setback due to postponement of SAARC summit

1737. SHRI E.M. SUDARSANA NATCHIAPPAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the SAARC relations had a setback due to the postponement of Dhaka meet 2005; and

(b) if not, whether the Indian diplomacy has been utilized to strengthen the unity among the people to people relationship of Nepal and Bangladesh with India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) No, Sir.

(b) India and Nepal share a unique relationship of friendship and cooperation underpinned by ties of language, culture and kinship. This special relationship is also manifest in the open borders between the two countries. Government of India has always attached high priority to development of people-to-people relations with Nepal. Exceptionally liberal bilateral trade and transit treaties, generous development assistance programmes, scholarship schemes for Nepalese students, as well as a number of projects launched for improving infrastructure in the border areas have all contributed to strengthening people-to-people linkages.

India and Bangladesh have shared history and socio-cultural heritage and extensive people-to-peole contacts. The Indian High Commission in Dhaka issues approximately 500,000 visas every year for tourism, family visits and pilgrimages. A large number of Bangladeshis are studying in India on self-financing basis and over 100 on Government of India scholarships given annually. Many Bangladeshis visit India for medical treatment.

People-to-people contacts are also facilitated through cultural exchanges and human resouces development. The High Commission of India has an active cultural centre which regularly hosts cultural programmes. The centre also runs a library where Indian books and newspapers, including in Hindi and Bangla, are available.

India has contributed to the development of human resources in Bangladesh in the field of personnel training and institutional capacity. This has generated goodwill among the people of Bangladesh.

Confidence building measures between India and Pakistan

1738. DR.AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government had submitted a 72 point agenda to Pakistan for confidence building in October 2004;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the Pak response thereto;

(c) whether the same was later pared down to a 30 point agenda;